

Behavioral and Social Science Volunteer Program



Background

The *Behavioral and Social Science Volunteer (BSSV) Program* was established by the American Psychological Association's (APA) Office on AIDS to increase the involvement of behavioral and social scientists in local HIV prevention activities. The BSSV Program, with CDC funding, has established a national network of volunteers to assist with HIV prevention efforts in their communities. This network of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and public health experts provide free and ongoing technical assistance to community-based organizations (CBOs), health departments, and HIV community planning groups (CPGs) that want state-of-the-science prevention for their community.

Purpose

The BSSV Program provides a mechanism for behavioral scientists to become ongoing and active participants in their community's HIV prevention planning and implementation process. The program was developed in response to a growing recognition of the ways behavioral and social science theory, research, and methods can be used to assess community needs, prioritize interventions, and target HIV prevention programs. For example, volunteers can work with prevention planners and implementers to:

- Determine local community norms and barriers to prevention
- Document prevalence and determinants of HIV-related risk behavior
- Design effective programs based on sound theory and research
- Adapt existing programs to new populations and settings
- Evaluate the effectiveness of HIV prevention interventions

Program Activities

The BSSV Program focuses on identifying and preparing qualified behavioral and social scientists who either want to get involved or are already involved in local HIV prevention efforts. Specific BSSV program activities include:

- Implementing a nationwide recruitment program using numerous APA communication channels
- Orienting and training new volunteers to work effectively with HIV prevention planners and implementers
- Linking volunteers to community-based organizations and community planning groups in need of technical assistance

Potential volunteers complete a *Volunteer Program Application*. Once this is completed, a member of the BSSV Program staff interviews the volunteer and creates a biographical profile based on the application and interview. This profile, edited and approved by the volunteer, is used by APA to help select the most appropriate local volunteer for the agency requesting technical assistance.

For more information about the BSSV Program

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